Australia’s overseas aid program operates in complex and challenging environments.

The Office of Development Effectiveness (ODE) seeks to deepen our understanding of what works and what doesn’t in these different contexts. ODE conducts and publishes evaluations and assessments of aid quality to help our aid deliver better outcomes for the poor and for Australia’s national interests.

ODE’S EARLY YEARS

ODE was an initiative of the 2006 Aid White Paper Promoting growth and stability.

In its early years, ODE designed the aid performance assessment system that is still used today, and undertook major evaluations that shaped Australia’s aid delivery. This included evaluations of our anti-corruption support and assistance for service delivery in fragile states.

The Independent Evaluation Committee (IEC) oversees ODE and serves to enhance the independence and quality of ODE’s work. Mr Jim Adams, a former vice-president of the World Bank, chairs the IEC. The IEC also assures and endorses ODE’s assessment of the annual Performance of Australian aid report.

By the end of 2016, ODE had published 45 evaluation and performance reports, and monitored the implementation of its recommendations across Australian aid policies and investments.

ODE’s work has covered Australia’s bilateral aid partners, multilateral and non-government organisations, and has spanned sectors from health and education through to infrastructure and aid for trade.

“I congratulate ODE for twice winning the Australasian Evaluation Society Award for Best Public Sector Evaluation.

ODE’s work plays an intrinsic role in DFAT’s efforts to identify what is working and what is not, and to build on successful aid approaches.”

The Hon Julie Bishop MP, Minister for Foreign Affairs

ODE TODAY

ODE’s three main functions are to:

• monitor the quality of DFAT’s performance assessment system
• support evaluations undertaken by DFAT program areas
• commission and undertake major evaluations.

ODE and the IEC oversee implementation of the DFAT Aid Evaluation Policy. Released in November 2016, this policy seeks to increase the quality, transparency and relevance of aid evaluations conducted by DFAT. Steps include the publication of an annual Aid Evaluation Plan covering aid evaluations conducted across DFAT.

“Through its evaluations, ODE demonstrates the value of what we do in some of the most politically unstable and economically weak environments in the world, and recommends how we can improve.”

Frances Adamson, Secretary, Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade
MAKING A DIFFERENCE

ODE’s evaluations are recognised for their quality and influence.

ODE evaluations have won the Australasian Evaluation Society Award for Best Public Sector Evaluation in 2014 and 2016. These awards recognise an evaluation by an Australasian public sector institution (national, state or local) that has brought real and measurable change in policies or programs. The awards related to ODE’s evaluations of the Australian NGO Cooperation Program and Australian Volunteers for International Development. These evaluations led to program efficiencies and improved monitoring and evaluation to support the work of 53 Australian NGOs in 57 countries and over 1,300 volunteers in 29 countries.

ODE’s evaluation of Australian aid and child undernutrition (2015) found that stunting rates due to undernutrition exceeded 50 per cent of children in Timor-Leste: one of the highest rates in the world. Only 1 per cent of Australian aid was allocated to nutrition at the time. Following this evaluation, Australia committed to improving nutrition through all its programs in Timor-Leste. Nutrition was identified by the evaluation as one of the best investments to further human and economic development, given its impact on learning, earning potential and economic productivity.

ODE’s evaluations have contributed to more productive relationships with our multilateral partners. ODE’s Banking our aid evaluation (2014) examined Australia’s project funding to the World Bank and Asian Development Bank between 2005-06 to 2012-13 covering a total value of $4.1 billion. This evaluation led to a renewed emphasis within DFAT on ensuring staff are well-prepared for partnerships with the multilateral development banks and informed donor-wide changes to funding arrangements with the World Bank.

“We found the (Banking Our Aid) report balanced and insightful in its assessment of trust fund contributions to the World Bank Group.”

Joachim von Amsberg, Vice-President, Development Finance, World Bank

Preventing violence against women

ODE’s Violence against women in Melanesia and East Timor report (2008) drew on consultations with more than 700 stakeholders from government, NGOs and communities in five countries. Those consulted confirmed that violence against women was severe and pervasive in the region. But there was little published, quantitative research. Many survivors felt sensitive, or even ashamed, about discussing the violence they had suffered. ODE’s report allowed those providing support to understand more deeply the extent of gender-based violence and the harm it causes. The report provided the framework for the Government’s Stop violence response (2009) with an evidence-based action plan that focused on three goals: improving women’s access to justice; increasing women’s access to quality support services; and preventing gender-based violence.

Major DFAT programs, such as the $320 million Pacific Women Shaping Pacific Development initiative and the Gender Equality and Women’s Empowerment Strategy, continue to be guided by the 2009 plan. More recent ODE evaluations, such as on support for women’s leadership (2015) and economic empowerment (2014), continue to inform Australia’s evidence-based approach to gender equality. ODE will commence a follow-up evaluation this year on the effectiveness of our support to address violence against women and girls.

“The ODE report was a turning point ... Knowledge really is powerful—and can be used to great effect to change policies, get political commitment and ultimately achieve better outcomes for women and girls experiencing violence.”

Natasha Stott-Despoja AM, former Ambassador for Women and Girls
Humanitarian crises

ODE evaluations have made our humanitarian responses more effective. The *Evaluation of Australia’s humanitarian response to the Syria crisis* (2014) recognised Australia’s leadership in improving humanitarian access in Syria through Australia’s role as an elected member of the United Nations Security Council (2013–14). The evaluation recommended providing greater financial certainty to humanitarian organisations to improve the impact of their activities through multi-year rather than annual funding. Subsequently, $220 million over three years was announced in the 2016-17 Budget by the Minister for Foreign Affairs, Julie Bishop MP, to address the humanitarian and longer-term resilience needs in Syria and neighbouring countries which host large numbers of refugees. DFAT also upgraded its humanitarian staff capacity to the region to ensure our support was effective and adapted to emerging developments on the ground.

Australia has a leadership role in preparing for and responding to crises in the Pacific, one of the most natural disaster-prone regions in the world. A soon to be released evaluation of Australia’s response to Vanuatu’s Cyclone Pam will provide recommendations to enhance our response to future disasters in the Pacific.

“ODE’s evaluations of the Syria and Horn of Africa responses provide valuable insight into how Australia, and the world, can help lessen the loss and suffering of the millions currently trapped by protracted, conflict-ridden crises.”

*Penny Hawkins, former Head, Evaluation Unit, UK Department for International Development*

**LOOKING AHEAD**

In 2017 ODE will publish evaluations on Australia’s aid support in the following key areas:

- pandemics and emerging infectious diseases
- climate change assistance
- disability inclusiveness
- electoral systems strengthening.

Further, ODE will oversee the implementation of the annual Aid Evaluation Plan. These evaluations and ODE’s performance work will continue to guide Australia’s aid and build the evidence base for effective development.
ODE’S PUBLICATIONS

Evaluation of the partnership between the Secretariat of the Pacific Community and the Government of Australia (2016)

Investing in teachers (2016)

Gearing up for trade: Australia’s support for trade facilitation programs (2016)

Review of operational evaluations completed in 2014 (2016)

2015 Quality review of aid program performance reports (2016)

Building women’s leadership: the contribution of Australia Awards Scholarships (2015)

Review of uptake of ODE recommendations (2015)


Evaluation of the Australian NGO Cooperation Program (2015)

Independent verification of the MAMPU program (2015)


Research for better aid (2015)

Working in decentralised service systems (2015)

Smart economics: evaluation of Australian aid support for women’s economic empowerment (2014)


Australia’s response to the Horn of Africa crisis, 2011 (2014)

2013 Quality review of aid program performance reports (2014)

Two reviews of Australian aid operational evaluations (2014)

Evaluation of aid to Timor-Leste (2014)

Lessons from Australian aid report (2014)

Australian Volunteers for International Development evaluation report (2014)

Thinking and working politically: an evaluation of policy dialogue in AusAID (2013)

Building on local strengths: evaluation of Australian law and justice assistance (2012)


From seed to scale-up: lessons learned from Australia’s rural development assistance (2012)

Working beyond government: evaluation of AusAID’s engagement with civil society in developing countries (2012)

Philippines country program and strategy evaluation (2012)

Case study: linking central reform to service delivery (2011)

Australia update for the evaluation of the implementation of the Paris Declaration Phase 2 (2010)


Service delivery for the poor: lessons from recent evaluations of Australian aid (2009)

Australian aid to water supply and sanitation services in East Timor and Indonesia – evaluation report (2009)

Australian aid to health service delivery in Papua New Guinea, Solomon Islands and Vanuatu (2009)

Improving the provision of basic education services to the poor in Papua New Guinea: case study (2009)

Improving the provision of basic education services to the poor in Lao PDR: case study (2009)

Annual review of development effectiveness, 2008 (2009)

Evaluation of the implementation of the Paris Declaration: case study of Australia (2008)

Food security in Africa: towards a support strategy for Australia (2008)

Violence against women in Melanesia and East Timor: building on global and regional promising approaches (2008)


Approaches to anti-corruption through the Australian aid program: lessons from PNG, Indonesia and Solomon Islands (2007)

Assessment of Indonesia country program strategy, 2003-06 (2007)